**Facts about Greek Tragedy and Comedy**

[**https://asd-hs.wikispaces.com/ELA+Drama**](https://asd-hs.wikispaces.com/ELA+Drama)

**Ancient Greek Playwrights**

These are the major ancient Greek writers of tragedy and comedy. They are poets whose plays you  still see in performance today, more than two millennia later.

* [Aeschylus](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/drama/p/Aeschylus.htm)
* [Sophocles](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/sophocles/p/Sophocles.htm)
* [Euripides](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/medeaeuripides/p/Euripides.htm)
* [Aristophanes](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/aristophanescomedy/g/Aristophanes.htm)

**Features of Ancient Greek Tragedy**

1. **Suffering:**  
   Tragedy revolves around a tragic hero who suffers misfortune.
2. **Cleansing:**  
   In his [*Poetics*](http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_aristotlepoetics.htm#_ednV), Aristotle wrote about the qualities of tragedy, which include a ***catharsis*** or cleansing. See: [Aristotle's Tragedy Terminology](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/greektheater/tp/0711307Arist_tragicterminology.htm).
3. **Religious:**  
   Greek tragedy was performed as part of an estimated 5-day Athenian religious festival, which may have been instituted by the tyrant Peisistratus in the second half of the sixth century B.C.
4. **Honored Dionysus:**  
   The Great Dionysia, the name of this festival, was held in the Attic month of Elaphebolion, from the end of March to mid-April.
5. **Competitions:**  
   The dramatic festivals were centered around competitions, agones.
6. **Prizes:**  
   Three tragic playwrights competed for the prize for the best series of three tragedies and a satyr play.
7. **Myth:**  
   The subject matter was usually from mythology.
8. **History:**  
   The first surviving full play was not mythological, but the recent history-based play *The Persians*, by Aeschylus.
9. **Not bloody:**  
   Violence usually occurred offstage.
10. **The original Thespian:**  
    The first competition is thought to have been held in 535 B.C. at which time Thespis, the person credited with the first speaking role, won.
11. **Limitations:**  
    There were rarely more than a chorus and 3 actors, regardless of how many roles were played. Actors changed their appearance in the skene.
12. **Why Masks?:**  
    The theaters were so capacious that actors couldn't count on people in the back rows seeing their facial expressions; hence, masks.
13. **No microphones needed:**  
    Actors needed good projecting voices, but the theaters also had impressive acoustics.

**Aspects of Greek Comedy**

1. [Greek Comedy](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/greektheater/g/091609GreekComedy.htm) is divided into Old and New.
2. Since the only Greek comedy comes from Attica -- the country around [Athens](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/geography/g/122907Athens.htm) -- it is often called Attic Comedy.
3. Old Comedy tended to examine political and allegorical topics while New Comedy looked at personal and domestic themes. For comparison, think of the [The Colbert Report](http://uspolitics.about.com/b/2006/04/30/satire-treads-where-reporters-fear-to-go.htm) vs [How I Met Your Mother](http://tvcomedies.about.com/od/photogalleries/ig/How-I-Met-Your-Mother-gallery/).
4. Euripides (one of the 3 great writers of tragedy) is considered an important influence on the development of New Comedy.
5. The primary writer of Old Comedy is Aristophanes; the primary figure for New Comedy is Menander.
6. The Roman comedy writers followed Greek New Comedy.
7. The relatively modern "[Comedy of Manners](http://classiclit.about.com/cs/articles/a/aa_restoration.htm)" can be traced to Greek New Comedy.

**General Information on the Greek Theater**

* Theatrical performances were religious and political.
* Always competitive, the winning Greek choregos and playwrights accrued great prestige.
* Men played the role of women.
* Actors wore masks and costumes.
* Performances were outdoors often on hillsides.
* The word "theater" comes from the word *theatron* which was the viewing area for the Greek audience.